

## Briefing note from ESS Headquarters on the ESS Round 12 pilot carried out in Ireland

Piloting for ESS Round 12 was carried out in Ireland (and one other country) in the summer of 2024. This note shares summary information on the pilot.

### Pilot approach

The pilot was carried out by a fully self-completion approach, comprising a web survey and paper questionnaire.

A concurrent approach was used, meaning that target respondents were given the option to complete either online or on paper at first contact.

A sample of addresses was drawn across Ireland from the GeoDirectory. The sample comprised 1,500 addresses and was divided into two parts:

- **Postal-first approach:** Those with unique addresses, where the national postal provider (An Post) could be expected to reliably deliver letters in the post. This comprised 1,040 of the 1,500 addresses (69%). For this part of the sample, a fully unclustered sample of addresses was drawn.
- **Fieldworker-first approach:** Those with non-unique addresses, where An Post could not be expected to deliver to reliably without names (which are not available in the sample frame) due to issues with using Eircodes. This comprised 460 of the 1,500 addresses (31%). For this part of the sample, a clustered sample was drawn across 23 sample points. Since letters could not be sent reliably in the post, fieldworkers from the agency carrying out the pilot (Ipsos B&A) were required to visit sampled addresses, attempt contact and leave the survey materials. The role of the fieldworker was quite limited – they were not expected to perform person selection, provide detailed information about the survey/task or provide any assistance with the questionnaire. They were instructed to leave materials at addresses if no one was at home when they visited.

For both approaches, there was a need to sample one eligible person (aged 15+) in the household. This was done through an instruction in the invitation letter and reminders/checks at the start of the questionnaire.

For all sample units (regardless of the approach) there were three contacts – the first with an invitation letter (also including a paper copy of the questionnaire) and the second and third with reminder letters.

Respondents were able to return paper questionnaires via a freepost return envelope that was included in the invitation materials. If the agency received a completed questionnaire or a sample unit explicitly refused to participate prior to the scheduled time for a subsequent visit, subsequent visits were not made.

For the ‘postal-first’ approach (i.e. where letters were delivered in the post) a €5 cash unconditional incentive was sent with the invitation letter. No unconditional incentive was provided for the ‘fieldworker-first’ addresses. For both sample types, those who completed the survey were given a €10 voucher.

It was expected that a response rate of between 25% and 30% would be delivered, resulting in an achieved sample of around 400 cases.

Tasks carried out by the agency included:

- Designing the sample and providing a specification to GeoDirectory.
- Managing the fieldworker-first part of the sample – e.g. allocating addresses to fieldworkers, providing briefing materials and monitoring their work.

- Arranging print and despatch of all materials (invitation and reminder letters, GDPR leaflet, paper questionnaire).
- Managing/administering incentives.
- Receiving calls/emails from target respondents and following up where needed.
- Entering responses from paper questionnaires into an online data entry questionnaire.

A centralised data collection platform was used, developed and hosted by Centerdata (part of the ESS Core Scientific Team). Programming the web survey and production of the paper questionnaire was managed centrally, with limited input from the agency (beyond carrying out checks). The platform was also used for uploading anonymised sample information (from the agency), monitoring data collection progress, and to host the data entry questionnaire mentioned above.

### Pilot outcomes

Pilot data collection was carried out between 10 June and 2 August 2024.

A response rate of 43% was achieved, significantly higher than the rate targeted. Very similar response rates were achieved for the two approaches.

The achieved sample size was 638, divided into 176 respondents completing the web survey and 462 completing the paper questionnaire (meaning that 72% completed on paper). These figures exclude cases where a questionnaire was received but less than 75% of 'ask all' questions were answered, as these were excluded from the final data.

### Round 12 main stage implications

It is expected that the main stage of Round 12 in Ireland will follow a similar approach to that used for the pilot. However, a third reminder will be added for the main stage. Additionally, for the postal-first part of the sample, a fieldworker non-response phase is required (see ESS Round 12 Specification for further details).

For the pilot, ESS Headquarters worked directly with the agency without the input of a National Coordinating (NC) Team. For the main stage, the NC will have an important role in liaising with the agency to ensure the delivery of the survey reflects the specification.

Most tasks delivered by the agency reflect what will be required for the main stage. However, for the main stage, the agency or NC will play a larger role in finalising the questionnaire (particularly regarding any formatting edits needed to the paper questionnaire) and in processing the data (this task was covered by ESS Headquarters for the pilot, but for the main stage is the responsibility of national teams).

The same data collection platform (from Centerdata) will be used for the main stage. This means that the web questionnaire and most elements of the paper questionnaire will be produced centrally. Due to the central approach, less work for national teams should be required to produce the main questionnaire data file from the self-completion to meet the ESS data protocol compared with previous rounds.

Please note that this document refers to the self-completion part of the Round 12 approach only and not the face-to-face approach. For the face-to-face approach, it is expected that most tasks will remain in line with requirements at previous rounds (but see the R12 Specification for further details).